The means are the end

Dharma Talk given by Thich Nhat Hanh on Dec 5, 1999 in Plum Village, France.

Today is the 5th December, 1999 and we are in the Upper Hamlet during our winter retreat. Last time we discussed about means and ends and we learned that in the practice of Buddhism there is no distinction between means and ends and means should be considered to be ends by themselves. This is a very strong practice and we should be able to rely on the Sangha in order to do it.

When you go to the Buddha Hall or to the Dharma Hall you know that you have something to do there: sitting meditation, or listening to a Dharma talk, or cleaning the hall but going there is also a practice. You are requested to sweep the meditation hall in mindfulness, you are supposed to sit beautifully when you listen to a Dharma talk, you are supposed to be concentrated, to be mindful during your sitting meditation so the practice takes place in the meditation hall, but we should know that the practice also takes place during your walking there.

That is why we should try to be practicing during the time we walk to the meditation hall and if you succeed in every step you take then the sitting meditation, or the Dharma talk or the cleaning of meditation hall will be a success.

Because we have the habit of wanting things to be done that is why we tend to neglect, to underestimate the value of the means.

At this time of autumn, I usually rake the leaves in the hermitage. I do this every three days or so and I use a rake. I know that raking the leaves is to have a clean path in order to walk, to do running meditation and so on; I run every day at least two times -I practice mindful running and I rake the leaves in that way(mindfully). Raking the leaves is not only to have only a clean path to run or to walk, but raking the leaves is just to enjoy raking the leaves. So I hold the rake in such a way that I can be happy and solid during the time of holding the rake. And every movement I do I want to make it into an act of enlightenment, an act of joy, an act of peace, so I am not in a hurry, because I see that the act of raking is as wonderful as having a clean path. I would not be satisfied with less than that. Every stroke I make should bring me joy and solidity and freedom. I should be entirely myself during the act of raking the leaves and raking the leaves is no longer a means to arrive at an end that is called having a clean path.

And you don't need to wait for a long time; if you can make one stroke like that, one movement like that, fully investing yourself into the act of raking the leaves then you will be rewarded right away. That is a perfect piece of art that you make because each movement is a work of art.

The same is true when you practice walking. Each step you make should be a perfect work of art, each step can bring you solidity, sovereignty because you do not walk like a slave, you walk like a free person. You walk like a Buddha because you have wanted to be a disciple, a daughter or a son of the Enlightened One, you want to be his continuation, that is why you are capable of making a step with sovereignty, you are fully in control of yourself. You are fully present in the here and the now and you enjoy that step. So walking meditation is not to arrive in the meditation hall. To arrive at the meditation hall is what you want, but you want more than that, because you arrive at the meditation hall several times a day and sometimes ten or twenty arrivals like that don't make any difference. So, one step is enough for you to arrive. I have arrived! With one step.

That is our practice but there is a habit energy that prevents you from doing so. You are used to running to believe that happiness is not possible here and now, happiness is possible only in the future. That kind of belief, that kind of habit energy has been there for a long time, transmitted by many generations of ancestors and coming to Plum Village is to have a chance to see it; that you are governed by your habit energy, by the tendency to run all the time. You

are not capable of being in the here and the now in order to touch the wonders of life that are available.
We have plenty of chances to practice. We know we wash your clothes, you are your dishes, you sweep the ground, you tend the garden, there are many things that you can do, but don't do it the way they do it in the world. Make it into a practice, a good practice and you will be rewarded right away and you know that you are dealing with your habit energy. The habit energy says, quick, quick, go, quick, quick, do it right away! The deadline is close but the practice is telling you the opposite thing, don't run, enjoy it, the here and the now is the only thing you have, happiness cannot be possible outside the here and the now, so you have two things contradicting each other and that is why the word training means that you slowly get over the habit energy and give yourself another habit energy that is good. The habit energy that you want to cultivate is the capacity to be in the here and the now and live every moment of your daily life deeply. Rake the leaves, enjoy it! Cook the breakfast! Enjoy fully the act of cooking. Wash the dishes! Enjoy fully the act of washing.
In the Hermitage every day I wash the dishes, every day I boil the rice and I take care of the flowers, of the plants and my practice is to enjoy every minute while doing these things. Yes, to write a poem is wonderful, to write an article is wonderful, to give a Dharma talk is wonderful but it is equally wonderful to take care of the bush, to take care of the plants, to wash the dishes and so on. Because it is very enriching, it is very rewarding, it can bring you a lot of peace and joy and solidity.
We know that happiness would not be possible if we have no stability and solidity and that is why we have to cultivate our stability, our solidity and offer it to ourselves because without the ground of stability and solidity no real peace, no real happiness could be possible. That is why learning how to rake the leaves, learning how to sweep the ground, learning how to wash the dishes is very important. Don't say that sitting meditation is most important or walking meditation is most important, or listening to the Dharma talk is most important. You listen to the Dharma talk in order to be able to rake the leaves. You listen to the Dharma talk in order to be able to wash the dishes, properly and enjoy it.
And in Plum Village we have the advantage of having many brothers and sisters doing the same and when we see one of them doing that we are supported. They don't do anything. They just do it, they don't say anything to us; they just do it. And when we see them doing that we have a chance to go back to ourselves and do it too.
And the practicing community is a great gift, like the sunshine. Everyone in France, maybe a lot of French people have the sun today but maybe because many of do not have the capacity of going home to the here and the now that is why the sunshine does not mean much to them. But if you know how to breathe in and become aware of the sunshine, you have a different kind of sun, the sun is for you And not for those who are so busy, who get lost all the time in their worries, in the past, in the future. The moon is supposed to be everyones' but there are those of us who never see the moon, never profit from the moon, never enjoy the moon.
And we live in Plum Village together for a week, for a month or three months, for a year and we practice together. There are those of us who are quite happy, there are those of us who are not quite happy yet, the same environment, the same Sangha, the same practice and yet we receive differently the amount of happiness and peace and stability and joy. And what makes that difference? What makes the difference is our capacity to put into practice the teaching that is given. And the Buddha was quite clear on this, life is available only in the here and the now, with all its wonders, if you continue to run, these wonders of life are not yours. So stop! Smile to the sun, smile to the moon, smile to your brother or sisters and specially, smile to yourself.
Recognize that you are there. You need to be nourished by peace, by joy. You have deprived yourself of these elements. It is you who have deprived yourself of peace and joy and nourishment and healing. Now the Dharma is to help you to stop that course of living. Look at yourself, smile to yourself, be kind to yourself, treat yourself with the practice. Learn how

to walk, learn how to breathe and smile, learn how to rake the leaves on the front yard. It is very important. The Kingdom of God, the Buddha Land is right there for you to touch.

Bell

If you have observed the monks and the nuns, if you have observed them in Plum Village you will notice that while they walk they don't talk, when they talk they stop to talk and to listen, and after talking and listening they resume their walking. Why do they do like that? Because when they talk and listen they want to invest 100% of themselves into the act of talking and listening. That is why they don't talk any longer while they are walking; they want to invest themselves 100% in the act of walking. They want to make real steps, steps that can bring them stability, solidity, freedom because they know that stability, solidity is the ground of happiness so they walk in order to cultivate that and to enjoy it at the same time.

That is why, if you come to Plum Village following that kind of example you join the practice. Not talking during walking is not a rule because we don't want to be victims of rules, we don't want any rule at all, we just want to practice. If you don't talk, that is because we want to practice. It is not that talking is a crime. But if you talk during the practice you ruin the practice.

In the teaching of the Buddha to be attached to rules is something that you are not encouraged to do. We should look at it as a practice and not as rules, like the ten novice precepts that we have here that you have heard yesterday. These are not rules for the novice. They are not there in order to restrict the freedom the happiness of the novice. They are there to help the novice to lead the happy life of a novice. Because these precepts should be considered to be the practice of mindfulness and if you practice accordingly you preserve your freedom, your beauty, your happiness. And if you think that these ten things are rules you have to submit yourself to, you have to surrender yourself to, you don't get it, you don't get the real thing and that is why the Buddha said, don't be the slave of rules and rituals. Rituals and rules, we don't need them; we need only the practice.

When we enter the Dharma hall everyone stands up and joins the palms. That is not a rule, that is the practice. And when the teacher enters the hall he is not affected by the respect shown to him. He practices walking also, mindfully, the practice of mindful walking is his practice. Walking mindfully is his practice and standing up and breathing and showing respect is your practice. These two things are equally important. And if you look on it as a ritual you are wrong. If you look at it as a rule you are wrong, you have to look at it as your practice and good practice can be recognized. When the teacher walks he should be a free person, he is not affected by pride, complex of arrogance, that is his practice. Your practice is to be respectful to the teacher, to enjoy standing like this, to breathe in, to breathe out, and smile and touch the many generations of teachers in history. When you get in touch with your teacher you get in touch with his teacher, her teacher, you get in touch with many generations of teachers, you get in touch with the Buddha, so that is your practice.

That is why you don't complain that you have to stand too long and the teacher is walking too slowly. The teacher practices his practice and you practice your practice and everyone is profiting from the practice and you know whether your practice is correct or not. You know by yourself that the practice is making you happy, peaceful, solid. You know the teacher takes care of his practice and you take care of your practice and we should not look at it as a rule or a ritual, otherwise we are caught in forms of rituals and rules and the Buddha is against rituals, mere rituals and rules.

When you hold a glass of water and drink it mindfully, the act is so beautiful and it looks like a ritual, right? But the one who is holding the glass and drinking he does not have any intention of making it into a ritual, a performance. He just enjoys holding the glass and drinking. But because mindfulness is there, very deep, very strong, so the act looks like a ritual, but it is not ritual, it is the practice.

When you bow like this and you feel that your mind and your body are coming together in concentration, in mindfulness and you feel that you are totally present and you are oriented to something good, true and beautiful, the nature of enlightenment, the nature of awakening in

you, so you inherit, you profit from it and you don't think of it as a ritual. But if you do it like a machine and when you see someone and you just imitate them without understanding, that is a ritual, that is a ridiculous thing to do, entirely empty. That kind of ritual is entirely empty and we should not do it.

That is why in big retreats in North America we always have new people, sometimes 50 to 60 % of the people who join the retreat are new people and they are embarrassed, they think of it as a ritual, they are not comfortable. That is why I always begin by saying, to bow or not to bow that is not the question! And to bow that is a ritual, so don't be caught in a ritual. Practice. If you think that doing like this will bring you concentration, insight and reverence that makes you good, that makes you happy and then you do it and you are free from rituals, you are free from rules.

So the ten novice precepts are practices that aim at helping the novice to be free, to be happy, to be solid and if you consider the precepts as something that limits your freedom you are wrong, you are caught in rituals, you are caught in rules and that is against the Buddhist spirit.

In the fifty one categories of mental formations there is one mental formation. It is described as a wholesome mental formation because there are unwholesome mental formations like anger, hatred, fear. They are not positive mental states but this mental formation is a good mental state. It can be translated as shame but it is very difficult to translate exactly. It means, you are ashamed of yourself when you realize that you don't practice as you should.

You don't need someone to tell you that you don't practice, you have got all the conditions for your success in the practice and yet you don't do it, and when you don't do it and every time you think of it you are ashamed. Please, help me to find the word in English. It means the same that happens when you confront another person. You see another person practicing, so well, so happy, so relieved and you feel ashamed in his or her presence.

If you are a Dharma teacher, or an apprentice Dharma teacher, or a future Dharma teacher you know that it would not be all right if you don't practice because you are sharing the Dharma. You are speaking in the name of the Buddha, the Bodhisattvas about the practice. You tell people to try to be mindful and to establish themselves in the here and the now and to touch the wonders of life in the here and now, to nourish themselves, to transform themselves and yet you don't do it, when you think of it, you have a sense of shame. That is a good mental formation, a wholesome mental formation because thanks to that mental formation you will change. You evolve, you become a better Dharma practitioner. That is why shame is the first of many wholesome formations.

People who don't have a sense of shame have no future. You should be ashamed of the fact that you don't practice when conditions favorable for the practice are all there within and around you. You have the teaching, you have got the instructions, you have got a place, you have got a house to live in, you have got food to eat, you have got brothers and sisters helping you, you have got a teacher, you have got every condition favorable for your practice and yet you don't practice. And every time you go back and see that situation and feel shameful that is a very good kind of energy that can transform you and make you into a better practitioner. All of us should be equipped by shame, that is a kind of cosmetic, a kind of adornment that every one needs. Adorn yourself with shame and then you will be a good teacher and then you will be a good student and then you will be a good Dharma teacher.

You have been given a chance to rake the leaves and you don't rake them as you should. You are given a chance to wash the dishes and yet you don't wash them as you should. You don't enjoy the practice of washing the dishes. You are given a chance to walk from your room to the meditation hall and you don't do it. You walk and yet you allow yourself to get caught in your anger, in your despair, in the past, in the future and shame is something that can rescue you from the state of being stubborn in your practice. That is why the Buddha said, equip yourself with shame and then you will become a good practitioner, a Bodhisattva and that is why shame is the number one of the good mental formations.

And you need another person to tell you the truth, to stand in front of you in order to have shame because you are capable of having that mental formation. Every time we see another

person in front of you and you feel ashamed that you cannot do like him or like his expectation of him and then you feel ashamed also.
Let us discuss about the student and the teacher relationship. Shame, plays a very important role. The teacher should be ashamed when he or she faces his disciple. He has to ask the question whether he is worthy of his disciple, his life, his practice, whether it is worthy of his disciple. Am I a worthy person in relationship with my disciple? And if the teacher does not have shame in him he is not a good teacher. He teaches things that he doesn't practice and the student also, when he faces his teacher he should have shame. The teacher has done his best in order to offer the teaching, to support him, to love him and yet he has not made use of this and become a good practitioner. He is ashamed every time he is in the presence of his teacher. So shame is helping both of them. Am I worthy of my teacher? Am I worthy of my disciple? That is the function of shame.
Now, let us talk about the relationship between big brother and younger brother, or big sister and younger sister in the Dharma. Because we all expect our brother or sister to practice, whether they are senior or junior. As a big sister we should be able to feel shame when we see a young sister practicing solidly, so well, and when you look at your sister in that way, with a sense of shame, you evolve, you become a better sister. And when you are a young sister and if you look at your big sister you know that your big sister is expecting you to practice well the mindfulness trainings, the mindful manners. She has done everything she could in order to help you, to support you to practice and yet you revolt against her, you don't know how to deepen your practice and in a way you betray her, you are unkind to your big sister.
The same is true of the brothers. A big brother is someone who knows that since he has been in the Dharma longer than his younger brother his practice should be good enough in order to serve as a model or as a support for his younger brother and if he does not behave well, he does not practice well, every time he sees his younger brother, the sense of shame will help him to improve. And every time he sees his younger brother he has an opportunity to go back to the practice and do it much better. And the younger brother also should know that in order to be a good young brother he should get down to the practice and by practicing he is making his big brother happy and he can even help his big brother. His big brother may have more difficulties within himself and blaming him is not helpful. Practice better and then you help your big brother.

When the monks and the nuns see a lay person, because in Vietnam and in many other countries the lay people support the monks with shelter and food. Every day the monks have to go and beg for the food and the lay people expect the monks to practice. So, when we hold the bowl of food and we do the five contemplations, we visualize where the food has come from and we see the earth, the sky, the hard work of the lay person, the love, the support of the lay person, we are ashamed that we don't practice well and because of that sense of shame we know how to eat mindfully and eating mindfully is already a good response to the lay person. When a lay person comes to the temple that is a good opportunity for the monks and the nuns to reflect and to nourish his/her shame in order to become a good practitioner.
So every day we have a lot of opportunities to see each other and we can have an impact on each other with our practice. In the world, our professors teach but they don't necessarily have to do it, what they need is to deliver the teaching and they get paid for it. They teach what they have got in terms of knowledge, conceptual knowledge, but teaching the Dharma is different. Whether in a monastery or in a Buddhist institute you just don't give this conceptual teaching. You have to teach with your practice, with your experience. That is why a Buddhist institute should be organized in such a way that the practice should go together with the classroom.
Even if you are a young sister very new to the practice, even if you are a young brother still new to the practice, but if you practice well, if you know how to walk mindfully, how to rake the leaves mindfully. You are already a teacher even if you don't actually deliver a speech,

because you embody the living teaching and the teacher is in the student and the student is in the teacher: interbeing. We have to recognize both in us. We have a teacher within and we also have a student within, at the same time, and that helps us to grow in the practice.

In fact, it is wonderful to have a place to be in, a place where conditions are favorable for the practice of transformation and healing. The earth, the sky, many living beings have come together to make the place available to us. The place has teachers, it has big brothers and sisters, the place has friends and supporters. We actually have every favorable condition for our practice and if we allow time to go by like that without getting down to the real practice we are being unkind to earth, sky, to teachers, to brothers, to sisters and to numerous living beings and we should be ashamed of that nature of unkindness in us and that is why we should wake each other up into that sense of shame so that everyone of us will be a better practitioner and we will be able to support each other in the practice.

When we are ordained as a lay person, upasika, upasaka, when we are ordained as a novice monk or nun we know that we are still new in the practice and should rely in our big brothers and sisters in the Dharma in order for our practice to take root. Sometimes our big Dharma brothers and our big Dharma sisters are still very young, much younger than us and we have the tendency to say that, well, they're just kids, they don't know much about life and they cannot really play the role of big brothers and big sisters for us. If you have the kind of thinking, you are wrong.

Many of us have realized that if we are ordained one day earlier we profit from that day. The earlier you get ordained the better because the day you ordain you have the opportunity to end, to realize, to recognize the habit energy. You want to shut the door behind you and you want just to go ahead and the process of transformation and healing can begin right away even if you don't know it.

Being in the Sangha as a member, as a full member and allowing the Sangha to embrace you, to protect you, to transform you is very important, whether you are a lay person or you are a monastic. You take refuge in the Sangha and even if you think that much has not been done or realized in you a lot is being done at the same time.

We have a sister who belongs to the generation of the Apple trees. She came from Canada, and after she went home and she thought that her practice was still very weak. She did not know the transformation that had taken place within her life and when she arrived at her home in Canada people looked at her with different eyes. They saw her peaceful, solid, smiling, fresh and she commands a lot of respect. The people who used to deal with her as a kid now began to deal with her with a lot of respect. She was so surprised to see how much people suffer! How much people suffer in her family, in her greater family, in her former environment in Canada. Two years ago it was the same but she didn't know it, didn't see it and now after twenty two months of practicing as a nun she went back and recognized all their suffering and at the same time they look at her and see how transformed she is just after twenty two months of being a nun. During that time she didn't think she had made a big progress at all. She just allowed herself to be in the Sangha, embraced by the Sangha, transported by the Sangha and the transformation just takes place slowly, like that. She has transformed but she didn't know it. She met a lady who suffered very much because of her situation and her husband and that lady used to look at her as a little girl but now that lady saw her and she was deeply inspired and she wanted to leave everything in order to become a nun. When her husband learned about it he was furious. He considered the young nun as his enemy who was about to take away his wife. Two years ago he used to look at her as a kid, as a little girl, but how could a little girl have such an impact on his wife? How could a kid have such an impact on a person like his wife? He had tried his best and he had not had any impact on his wife yet. In that state of anger he came to see her and she was smiling and inviting him to come to Plum Village, both of them.

It is not the amount of experience in society that counts, it is not the amount of knowledge that we have got in school that counts, it is the amount of training that you have to consider. So a very young sister, a very young brother that has entered the monastic life before you, you

have to really look at her as your big sisters, to look at him as your big brother and the notion of seniorship in the Dharma is very important. So, even if you are sixty and you just received the novice precepts you have to look upon the sixteen year old novice as your big brother or big sister. This is a good training. That is why every Sunday we sit in order of ordination in order to remind people that this is the practice of seniority, a long tradition of Buddhist practice. We learn the spirit of democracy, we try to encourage everyone to express himself/herself concerning how to make the life of the community happier, better organized. We encourage those who are reluctant to express themselves, we try to train them for them to be ready to contribute their insight. We learn to listen to everyone in the Sangha so that everyone can have a chance to express themselves, that is our learning about the spirit of democracy.

Another practice is deep listening, patience, and also encouraging speech but we still practice the spirit of seniorship because even if those monks and nuns are young they have been there longer in the practice and we should try to remember they are our big brothers in the Dharma, they are our big sisters in the Dharma and this is very helpful. Not to them, but to us. The younger brothers, the younger sisters in the Dharma we have to consult them because in them there is the presence of long time-wisdom transmitted by many generations of teachers. And you will be surprised to see that even if the novice is still young you can learn a lot from him or from her. And even if you compare your practice with his or hers you will see that your steps may not be as solid as hers, your breath may not be as mindful as his and out of that you have a kind of authentic respect because that respect is not for her, as a young novice, but it is for the Buddha because the young novice is the continuation of the Buddha. And you can see your teacher in the young novice because in every cell of her body, of his body there is the presence of the teacher in it.

In the Hermitage something just happened in the last two weeks. It makes me think very deeply. I have several pots of chrysanthemums in my veranda and among them there is a pot of white, pure white chrysanthemums, about twenty big chrysanthemums. I have been taking good care of that pot of chrysanthemums, I put in my veranda about eight pots of chrysanthemums. The veranda is made of glass and the sun rises from this direction and the sun is setting in this direction. The pot of white chrysanthemums I put here and next to it is a pot of cyclamen, what is the word in English for cyclamen? .Of violet flowers. And over here, another pot of chrysanthemums, violet, about two or three big flowers like this, as big as this pot and this second cyclamen is also violet. And this is pure white. And for my chrysanthemums I don't have to water from the top, because under each pot I have a container like this. I just pour the water and the roots over here naturally absorb the water. I do that every two days and they know the about of water they can absorb every day.

My door is here, I enter here from the Hermitage and I can enter here from the front yard and I observe and I have a hammock hung in here. You know everything now (laughter). Usually I sit in the hammock, I look and enjoy all the flowers in this direction but one day I sit and I look here and I saw that the white chrysanthemums are becoming violet. The fact is that the violet colors reflected into the glass and the setting sun is sending rays in this direction and this is receiving the sunshine. If you come to the Hermitage now you will see that the ten or twelve big chrysanthemums on this side have become half violet and the ten on this side are pure white.

The sixteen new novices can come and look. It is amazing! It is very beautiful! You don't have to do anything, just allow yourself to be in the Sangha. If you have trust you allow the Sangha to embrace you, to transport you in its spirit and energy and you will be transformed. So trust is very important, you have to believe, you have to have confidence. We all know that members of our Sangha are not perfect, nothing is perfect in this world, but the Sangha is important. I told you some time ago that last fall I went to Omega Institute and during walking meditation I saw a beautiful branch of autumn leaves, so beautiful, so harmonious. I came close and I saw that the leaves were not perfect. All the leaves were perforated a little

bit because of the insects or because of the fungi, but if you look at the branch they are so beautiful because of the harmony in it. So the Sangha is like that. Members of the Sangha may not be perfect but if we learn how to live in the Sangha with harmony and trust, each one in his/her position, that Sangha can perform a miracle, everyone who comes and touches the Sangha can be transformed.

The environment can have a very strong impact on the genetics, the culture of spirituality is transforming the cells in our body, the genes in our body. It is true! When you look at the white chrysanthemums becoming violet you see the wonders of life, you see the impact of culture and spirituality on the genetic heritage of mankind. So the Buddha has transmitted to us many genes, many elements of the spirituality of culture that will continue to have a deep impact on our lives. We have to be able to allow these elements to penetrate for our transformation and for our healing and the Sangha is the agent. The Sangha represents the Buddha, the Sangha practicing always the career of the Buddha and the Dharma, so having trust in the Sangha it is very important because the Sangha is the Buddha. And I have said several times that the next Buddha may take the form of a Sangha and each one of us can be a cell of that body, that Buddhakaya, that Buddha body.

We should give up what we consider to be our knowledge, our experience, because that knowledge has not helped very much. That experience has not helped very much, we still suffer a lot that is why we should be ready to give up in order to be free for the penetration of the Dharma, of the Sangha, of the Buddha to become possible and taking refuge in the Sangha, trust in the Sangha, allow the Sangha to transport you, to carry you. It is a comfortable feeling, a comfortable practice. And taking refuge in the Sangha is not a declaration of faith: it is our daily practice.

Questions & Answers

Dharma Talk given by Thich Nhat Hanh on Dec 9, 1999 in Plum Village, France.

Today is the 9th of December 1999, we are in the Lower Hamlet and it is time for us to ask questions concerning the Dharma talks that have been given in the last few weeks. You may ask in French, or in English or in Vietnamese. Let us take advantage of it.

Q: When I was in high school I took a psychology class and my psychology teacher was a behaviorist. And one aspect of the behaviorist school that he talked about was the idea that... he liked ton explain that we didn't have any free will, and that everything that happened to us was determined by our outside environment, sort of predestination in way, one domino falls and the rest of everything comes into place. My question is, I am wondering if Buddhism supports that notion because the idea of emptiness and interbeing seem to point in that direction for me, I am not sure. In your commentary on the Prajnaparamita sutra you talked about how we are empty because we are full of everything else, and that basically was what interbeing was, in a sense. So what I am wandering is, is there free will that makes the determination between which paths we take, and if there is a free will how is that reconciled with the idea of emptiness? Because if there is something that is inside that is screening, the outside environment it seems like not only am I a product of everything else that is outside but there is also something that is inside that is propelling something that I consider myself forward. To put it in the most basic terms, are emptiness and free will mutually exclusive?

A: Emptiness is made of free will and free will of emptiness. And that is the meaning of emptiness. It is like the right is made of the left, the left is made of the right and if you want to say that only one exists there is not emptiness. So you can answer the question of free will by yourself, with your direct experience of emptiness because we should live the insight of emptiness and not just talk about it. When you come to Plum Village you are given an opportunity to practice mindfulness, you are given equal opportunity. Like when you walk you can choose to walk in mindfulness, when you wash the dishes you may like to wash in mindfulness, and then there are brothers and sisters who are doing the same. So you have many opportunities to put into practice the teaching of mindful living. When you walk with mindfulness you become free and freedom is something that you can experience. Because you can walk as a slave being caught by the past, by the future, by your anger, by your afflictions but you can go back to your in breath, out breath and walk as a free person.

So freedom is a reality, not just a notion and it is a function of your practice and there are those of us who practice better than others and this alone proves that free will is possible. In the light of the practice this seems to be the only kind of freedom that we can get and if we know how to inherit, to make use of this freedom you will have a larger freedom which will be the fruit of this practice of freedom. Looking back at yourself, you know that to be free or not to be free depends on you to a large extent. So, go back to your breath and breathing in liberate yourself. This is something that we can do at any time of the day and we dont have to be caught in the speculation about whether freedom exists or not because we know very well that slavery is a reality but also freedom is a reality and that is the meaning of our getting together and leaning on each other for the practice.

Q: Je ne voudrais surtout pas paratre pr tencieux, mais il me semble que ce que nous lisons, ce que nous entendons, ait une connotation un peu pessimiste parce quil est question du manas 6-1 et 2, les deux fonctions du manas que vous avez not 6-1/6-2, mais le paragraph 6-2 ne parle que de manas passionn , jai entendu et jai lu dautre part cette stance qui est affiche aussi dans de diff rents mots, vivant dans le monde sans tre affect par les afflictions du monde, toute souffrance teinte, le bodhisattva passe magestueusement sur les vagues de la naissance et de la mort.頻 Je pense que l il conviendrait, la lumire de ce que nous avons lu ce matin, de lire: vivant dans le monde sans tre affect par les afflictions du monde, toute